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ABSTRACT

Compact counseling, an approach to short-term counseling, is presented as an effective, efficient, and structured tool for new or busy counselors. A model for using this type of approach is described in terms of (1) basic assumptions, (2) theoretical underpinnings of relationship and structure, (3) activities conducted in each of three sessions, and (4) advantages for both counselors and clients. A schematic "roadmap" is also provided in the form of a diagram outlining the three sessions of compact counseling. (Author/HLM)

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COMPACT COUNSELING

A Mini-Approach to Short-Term Counseling

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Introduction

If one had to name one innovation in counseling and therapy, it would probably be a plea for an efficient and effective technique rather than for a new method. Techniques and methods already exist in abundance where the counselor can get lost in a labyrinthine forest of a multitude of approaches, from Freudian couches to batting Encounter groups. And even if the novice in the field is thoroughly trained in any one of these methods, he or she will most likely modify or alter them to suit his own style and his own setting.

COMPACT COUNSELING was created not as another "new" technique, but as an efficient, effective, and structured tool for the new counselor, or the counselor who does not have time to counsel because she is busy with paper work and discipline problems. Certainly time, effort, and suitability of the method would be prime requirements to meet specific needs in today's busy schools and fast moving world. Our students still are in need of help for adjustment, but trained counselors and suitable counseling techniques are hard to come by.

Some Basic Assumptions

If we had to create an "ideal" counseling technique, based on what is known in the field rather than what might be unknown, the following basic requirements will have to be mentioned which will serve here as the basic assumptions for the COMPACT COUNSELING approach to be described below.

1. Relationship

It must provide for a time and place to establish and maintain a relationship as the essence that mediates from counselor to client and that operates on an affective, feeling-tone level.

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2. Outcome Measure

It must be based on a measurable concept, such as the Self-Image, so that outcome criteria can be assessed and success can be stated with some degree of precision.

3. Motivation

It must have the ingredient necessary to motivate the client to enter the counseling relationship and follow it through to the end which will bring the desired outcome.

4. Structure

It must have a structure to provide both client and counselor with a roadmap which they can both follow and study at the outset, not in retrospect when things have run afoul.

5. Mental Health

It must be mental health oriented, rather than assume psychopathology in the client, a priori.

6. Diagnosis and Treatment

Diagnosis and treatment must not be essential to the outcome of the counseling procedure, but may be imbedded in the entire process rather than being designated as counseling requirements sine qua non.

7. Brevity

It must be brief in terms of time investment since it has been proven in past research that improvements come early in a series of counseling sessions.

8. Cultural Appeal

Cultural appeal is important as far as the technique is concerned. Our American culture has shown successful endeavors in undertakings which are brief, short-term, compact, packaged, and economical.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Compact Counseling has two essential ingredients: Relationship and Structure. Both are minimal essential elements in a counseling process. Put simpler, counseling requires a pre-structured setting and a feeling-tone relationship. It is a three-layered vertical structure, with a basic psycho-motor or physical level (e.g., the office, speaking, or body language), cognitive-rational level (content of thought and insight), and affective-emotional level (the ultimate goal of feeling and emotion). A person with a problem has a low Self-Image which can be raised to higher levels of mental health through the process of counseling which is an interaction of relationship and structure.

Procedure

Fig. 1 shows the procedure in a simple roadmap form. There are three individual sessions with the client, as shown. In group adaptation, six

sessions are required cutting each individual session in half yielding two phases per session instead of four phases. Here is a brief discussion of the three sessions with their four phases each: (for a blueprint, see Fig. 1).

FIGURE 1 HERE

Session I

a. Emphatic Listening

The client is encouraged to state his problem, either verbally or in other ways of communication. He is free to talk, with the counselor taking the backseat in the role of active listener.

b. Antecedents to Problem

The counselor explores possible antecedents with the client, whereby the counselor now takes on a more active role by asking questions and looking for red flags and milestones in the client's problem.

c. Assessment of Self-Image

Assessment may be done formally (inventories, tests), or informally by looking in records and cumulative folders.

d. Supportive Assurance

The counselor assures the client of concern and help, in whatever form. He gives hope to the client so that he will return eagerly.

Session II

a. Ventilation.

The client is encouraged again to talk things out, to vent his emotions and feelings, with the counselor again being the active listener.

b. Pros and Cons

For the first time, the counselor tries to resist the client, if necessary, to point out some possible fallacious assumptions or erroneous thinking. He shows the client the "two sides of the coin."

c. Reality Confrontation.

If necessary, reality has to be pointed out by showing report cards, mentioning social disapproval, or making the client realize where his actions have led thus far.

d. Positive Reflections

The sessions is ended by again striking a positive note so that the client does not get discouraged but can look forward to possible solutions to his problems.

Session III

a. Capsuling

The counselor summarizes or "capsules" the quintessence gained from the first two sessions and sets the stage for solutions. It's a kind of inventory taking, listing assets and liabilities.

b. Formation of Solutions

Brainstorming leads into the search of possible solutions to the client's problem; potent ideas are reinforced, less valuable ones discarded. Both counselor and client go through a procedure of problem solving, step by step.

c. Alternatives and Strategies

Once the best solution is singled out, it is fully discussed. However, in case the plans might encounter obstacles, alternatives and strategies are outlined.

d. Closure

A most important phase of counseling is termination or closure. The client must feel that he has achieved something, that he has been shown the way to a solution, and that the helpful relationship has come full circle. Follow-up is discussed.

Advantages of Compact Counseling

It should be borne in mind that COMPACT COUNSELING is not a new theory nor is it an eclectic approach that contains a nibbling off all theoretical approaches to counseling. However, it does contain some of the proven methods and features of other techniques. The specific advantages of COMPACT COUNSELING are seen in the following:

1. It provides the novice counselor, the student, as well as the supervising official with a structured approach to counseling requiring minimal training with optimal results.

2. It encompasses essential features of the counseling process where efficiency in terms of time and effort, and maximally derived benefits are assured in a fast-paced world.

3. Its structured approach makes the technique compact yet flexible enough to allow the counselor and client great freedom within the confines of sessions and phases within the sessions.

4. No adherence to fetish or franchised methods is needed. Intensive training in workshops will provide the necessary professional background, under supervision, if needed.

FIGURE 1

The Schema of Compact Counseling
("A Roadmap to Follow")